

# Thoughts on Living and Voting in the U.S.A. As a Christian

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Suppose we were under an evil, anti-Christian government under which worshipping Jesus was illegal and punished severely. Or, imagine we were under a theocratic government whose laws were solely based on Jesus's teachings. In either of those scenarios, is our expectation from God different? Are we not supposed to live our lives like Jesus and his apostles taught and wrote, regardless of the consequences? I therefore contend that the "laws of the land" make no difference in the way we conduct ourselves and live our lives. However, we have a very different relationship to our government in the U.S.A. than the first Christians did, which for me creates a dilemma.

When the New Testament says in places like Romans 13 and First Peter 2 to submit to the authorities, the writers are clear. God is sovereign even over kings and governments, so he has put them in place, and we are to be submissive to them. In Romans 13:2, Paul even tells his readers not to "resist the authorities". It is fairly simple to comply with this guidance. However, because of documents like our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution, we in the U.S.A. have a very different relationship to our "governing authorities" than the Romans did (at least we're supposed to). Theoretically, we have a say in who's in charge of our government and what our laws are, unlike the authoritarian government that the ancient Romans were under. We are, therefore, basically in charge of our own government. This, to me, creates a dilemma about whom to vote for. Since we have this power, we have to decide what kind of government we want in charge. Should we strive for a theocratic government that codifies our Christian beliefs and values? That would certainly make our lives easier, in theory. But what is our mission, and what are our goals?

Is our goal to "convert" people to Christianity? To convince people to believe in and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior? If it is, will passing laws that ban sinful behavior help to accomplish this goal? Will making government bigger and bigger in the name of "social justice" help to accomplish goal? I contend that the answer to these latter two questions is "no". Codifying our "religious" beliefs, I believe, will make non-believers resent us even more. It also will not eliminate sinful behavior in the non-believing general public any more than outlawing drugs prevents people from using them if they want to. Even if outlawing sin were successful, it wouldn't matter because a person is not saved by a lack of sinful conduct, as Paul also makes clear in Romans 3 and Galatians 3. I further believe that giving government more size and more power, even if it uses its power and resources to help the poor, is also no good; it teaches people to rely on the government instead of relying on God! There is no need for God in my life if the government is going to give me everything I need. In many people's minds, this places government in the benevolent role that I believe the church should occupy. Big, benevolent government robs the church of opportunities to reach people through benevolence and charity. It also confiscates more money from tax payers that could otherwise be contributed directly to the poor or to churches and other charitable organizations, which use money more efficiently than government agencies.

I certainly would not encourage sinful behavior, nor do I want the poor and marginalized to starve or be unsafe. I simply disagree with both the Republican and Democratic Parties' view on what the role of government is. While I would never encourage someone to use drugs or act on homosexual urges, I do not think the government should be the moral authority in our country. I think the church should be the moral authority. I do not think the government should be the charitable authority in our country. I think the church should be the charitable authority. I would love to see the size of government shrink dramatically, including shrinking the social programs that "help" the poor; I would love to see dramatically lower taxes so that those of us who contribute to our churches and other charitable organizations would have more money to be able to contribute to helping the poor directly and through these religious organizations. Some seem to believe the government should force Christian morality on people by banning sinful behavior; some seem to believe the government should force charity on people by using more and more tax money to help the poor. I believe in neither. I would love to see the church step up to fill those roles.

For me, then, the choice is clear: the Libertarian Party (LP). I vote libertarian not because it's merely an alternative to the two major political parties with which I disagree, but because the LP stands for smaller government, lower taxes and individual liberties. This would remove the government from its role as the moral and charitable authority in our lives and open up more opportunities for we, the church, to reach people. I therefore can feel good about voting by my conscience, regardless of the outcome of any election.

Footnote: Were I in charge, I would not eliminate government welfare programs completely, nor would I eliminate all morally-based laws (such as outlawing murder, driving under the influence, fraud, and other acts that harm others). I would, however, reduce both.